

This transcript was developed using an AI-based speech to text generator. We apologize for any typos or other errors.

“Boxing, Bricks, and the Grace of God” The Rev. Garrett Kane
(06/09/2024, The Third Sunday after Pentecost)

I don't know about you, but I have this urge inside of myself since I was a child to re-enact some of my favorite scenes in the movies that I love so dearly. And I grew up doing it, and I've seen adults doing this too, so I know it's not a weird thing that I do. Now, I'm going to explain it more, and it'll make sense, but there's the famous scene in Titanic, maybe you and Andrea have, yeah, oh, we could even, no, yeah, you know it. It doesn't look as good on a bass tracker, but it's still like the thought that counts when people are trying it out. If you're riding your bicycle, and you've got this little puppy wrapped in a white towel, and you can wear a red sweater, and if you have like a pug or a friendship, it can look like ET a little bit, if you're riding around your neighborhood, maybe you could ride around Waco on a moped with your significant other Audrey Hepburn Gregory Peck, Roman Holiday, Waco Holiday. You could go to all the different magnolia sites and do all the things. It could work. But the best place to re-enact a scene from a movie, in my opinion, is in Philadelphia at the Museum of Art, and I'm getting some nods, and I love it, because there is a movie from 1976 called Rocky. It is one of my favorite movies. I love all the Rocky movies, some more than others, but I love the Rocky movies, and Sylvester Stallone has this scene where he goes up the steps, and there's a dance, he's dancing a little bit, he holds up his arms. I've made my own pilgrimage to these steps before.

I have lifted my arms in the place.
For a while was a statue that Sylvester Stallone had donated to the city of Philadelphia, that stood at the top of the steps that was moved to the bottom of the steps, unfortunately, but you can go up there.
I know it's not weird that I did that because everyone around me was up at the top of the steps as well, taking their photos.
The story of Rocky, this lovable, meathead, debt collector, turned boxer, turned successful boxer, is a story about perseverance, it is about losing, it is about defeat, it is a brokenness, this undignified man, trained so hard, and ends up losing his first fight in Rocky 1.
And this scene of him at the top of the steps in subsequent films and in the first one is just this scene of joy, he's persevering.
There's another scene though that comes up in Rocky 3 before a fight that he's about to have, and he is on a beach at this point.
He's not anywhere near these steps, and he's on the beach with his wife, Adrian, and he's breaking down.
He says that he's afraid.
He says that he's afraid of losing all that he has, that he feels like a liar, that he holds himself responsible for the death of a close friend, and he is just a mess.
He's crying into his wife's arms and yelling, he's angry, all of these emotions, and I don't know about all of you, but I would rather re-enact Rocky at the top of the steps, rather than Rocky down the shore on the beach, weeping and weak and painful.
I would much rather be at the top of those steps joyful than acknowledging my weakness, than acknowledging our suffering.
There's a reason that there's a statue at those steps, rather than a statue somewhere in Asbury Park near the pier where Rocky's crying, and it's no surprise that we want to experience these joys and these highs of life rather than the lows.
You remember with joy probably the first day that your company made a dollar rather than when it went under for bankruptcy.
You remember with joy your wedding day and probably not with joy the court date as it came to an end.

These are things in our lives that we would much prefer to remember these happy times to celebrate and re-enact these happy times than instead of the low times.

So I want to tell you what St. Paul has to say about these low moments.

I want to tell you about the church in Corinth, and I want to tell you also about a bunch

of old sandstone bricks that are in Eastern Germany.

So we heard a section of 2 Corinthians read today that St. Paul wrote.

He writes these letters to a church in Corinth.

Corinth is this port city.

There are new ideas, new teachers coming in and out of the city all the time, like the

ships coming in and out of the city.

There's new teachers, there's new ways of looking at the world, new ideas about what

the Christian life means and what's central to the Christian life.

And Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians as many ideas about what the Christian life

was about is kind of coming in and out of their fledgling congregation.

These teachers that were not Paul by all accounts had better could speak better than Paul.

They had more money than Paul.

They looked better on paper than Paul.

But Paul has what a lot of these other teachers in his mind don't have.

He also has this dogged way of looking at what the gospel really is.

And it for him is about suffering and about Christ who suffers with us in our suffering

in those low moments.

In verse 16 he says, writing to the Corinthians, we do not lose heart.

Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

I don't need to tell you that our outer natures are wasting away.

I mowed my lawn this last week and my back is hurting in ways I didn't think it could

hurt.

This is a new thing for me.

We get older.

The bodies that we have don't last forever.

And the promises that God makes to God's people is to care for them.

Not just caring for them in their bodies, but caring for them forever.

And this exhortation that Paul has to not lose heart, it's not something that encourages

us to hate our bodies, to hate the gift that God has given us in these bodies.

But it's the sober acknowledgement of the way things are in life.

It says that we are breaking down that we waste away physically, but

our inner nature
is renewed day by day through the Holy Spirit, through the gift that
we are given at baptism
through meeting Christ in the bread and the wine when we come together
for Eucharist.
Paul puts this point on the cross at Jesus at his weakest.
And that's what gives him and what gives us strength.
From Paul's perspective, this suffering of Christ and this theology of
God valuing
us and God being strong when we are weak, that has to be central to
what the gospel
is, to what Christ taught and to what we teach and what we live.
The fragility of our bodies and this outer nature that is wasting
away, it drives us to
do things that we probably wouldn't do otherwise in a perfect world.
And you may not have as much money as Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk to be
able to have all the
toys to launch yourself into space, but you, too, have to reckon with
this mortality.
And you can sure as heck go on a three-day bender that's triggered by
some test about a tumor
that's not as benign as it used to be.
You know people, other people, always other people, that have become
shells of themselves
following a surgery where the painkillers that we're supposed to help
them are not helping
them as much anymore.
You know people that have fallen off ladders that have tripped on
gravel or curbs where
their bodies seem to be fighting against them.
You know people that have suffered so much that are at the end of
their rope.
Paul's point, the point of the gospel and the point that every priest
here will tell
you is that we don't lose heart because God's power is found in this
brokenness, in our
weaknesses, in the ways in which we can't help ourselves.
In our worst moments, when all of the lies are spoken, when all of the
bottles are empty,
when all of the people that we love so much are estranged, that is
when God, in verse
14, Paul says, brings us into his presence through Jesus Christ,
through the suffering of
Jesus Christ and the cross, to give us mercy, to give us grace, and to
forgive us even
when we can't forgive ourselves.
On to these sandstone bricks.
Between February 13th and 15th and 1945, there is this town in East
Germany, Dresden.
This town was bombed by Britain and by the US Air Force bombers.

It's very late in the war.
And the reason I'm talking about this is now that I'm a dad, I'm kind of getting into
like war stuff, right?
Like that's what you do.
That's your like next step.
Let's start getting into America, yeah, it's a thing.
So nearly 4,000 tons of bombs are dropped on this city, this cultural gem, and it's a
contentious bombing, but what happened during this bombing is, and these stones is what
I want to tell you about.
There's a church that sits in the middle of Dresden, sat in the middle of Dresden, it's
called the Frouin Kirch, the church of our lady.
And this church had a gigantic dome, and it was bombed, did not fall during the bombing,
but the firestorm, all of the flames eventually warped the building enough, warped the stone
enough that the dome came down.
And it was only in 1990 that the city started to build again, to want to rebuild the church.
Even this sandstone in the region, if you ever have been to this region of the world,
sandstone kind of has this chemical reaction or can get older, and you can tell an old brick
by how dark it is, it's kind of a blacker color than the sandstone that's cream or white.
And so when they're rebuilding this church, much of this construction that happened, they
had to set aside nearly 9,000 stones, the altar, after 60 years of being under the rubble,
was nearly in really good condition.
And so when you go to Dresden today, you can look at this church that they rebuilt over
12 years, and you can see, if you look at the dome, it is peppered with stones that are
black and old from fire, from sutt, and there are stones that are new, that are clean, that
have renewed the whole facade of this gorgeous church.
This dome ends up looking like us, like you, like me.
Life will continually level us, it will not be fair.
We might be afraid of the people that we live with.
We can't bear the lies that are told to us or the lies that we tell to other people.
The pain that exists, we don't want to be on the beach crying in someone's arms, we'd
rather be on the steps with our hands in the air, and we'll do anything to numb that
pain.

The promise of faith, though, that God brings to us in His presence is that we are filled with this grace.

That's what we hear in Corinthians today.

The gospel is that Christ has bound up death in death's own home and set us free.

The promise of faith is that Christ shares our sufferings and that you are not alone.

That God has taken what is frail and will make it strong.

That all of the stones, all of the dark stones and the light stones, the ones that are old

and that are new will come together and be made whole by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.